

Habitat and Agriculture in Clark County



If you live along side a stream in Clark County and practice agriculture, you may be affected by habitat protection requirements. These regulations were recently adopted to protect existing riparian habitat characteristics from substantial degradation due to agricultural activities. This flyer explains a bit about the program and where to get more information.

The Habitat Conservation Ordinance was originally enacted in 1997 to protect habitat from development and other land clearing activities. In response to a state mandate, it was amended in the summer of 2006 to include protections on agricultural lands. The ordinance allows a landowner to choose a habitat protection method from two options: the Habitat Protection Plan option, and the Default option. The Default option is simple, requiring avoidance of agricultural activities within a certain distance of a stream. Implementing a Habitat Protection Plan enables the landowner to continue agricultural practices within the habitat area so long as existing habitat characteristics are protected.

A committee of citizens, technical people, and interest groups developed a set of guidelines to help landowners prepare a Habitat Protection Plan. The guidelines contain detailed instructions in an easy-to-use kit format. Kits are available from the Clark Conservation District, located at 11104 NE 149th St, Building C in Brush Prairie. Their phone number is (360) 883-1987.

Process

The agricultural part of the ordinance says there should be "no substantial degradation" of habitat characteristics that existed in July of 2006. The Habitat Protection Plan option is designed to keep habitat from degrading. That's not the same as improving conditions or even keeping them exactly as they were. If you would like to improve the habitat on your land, there are many ways to do it. Contact one of the resource agencies listed on the next page for more information.

The Habitat Protection Plan comes in a kit. It helps you identify the riparian habitat characteristics on your property and offers ways to keep it from degrading. Help is available from resource agencies and trained Agricultural Technicians. Contact information is included in the kit.

The first step is to map your property. Use an aerial photo if you can. There are instructions on how to print one in the kit.



Show buildings, roads, fields, streams and other landmarks. You can also use the map to show wetlands, drainages and wood in the stream.

The second step is to describe the habitat conditions on your land. The kit explains how to rate habitat conditions such as stream quality, fish habitat and wildlife habitat. Here's an example:

Rooted Banks

A good solid root structure of woody plants along stream banks helps prevent erosion. Estimate the amount of the total length of the stream bank that provides the bank protection in the picture below.

Rate it

High- More than 2/3 of the bank is stable
Medium- 1/3 to 2/3 of the bank is stable
Low- less than 1/3 is stable.



The third step helps you choose which Best Management Practices will work on your farm to keep the habitat conditions from degrading. This section of the kit shows pictures of farming practices, describes how and where they can be used and lists some things to consider about them. For example:

Field Borders. A Field Border is a strip of permanent vegetation established at the edge or around the perimeter of a field. The border is situated as a buffer between crop land, grazing land, forest land, and environmentally sensitive areas. Field borders can serve as filter strips which help remove sediment and excess nutrients from runoff.



The final step in the kit is a review by a trained agricultural habitat technician. After the ag-tech certifies that the plan will work and you agree to implement it, the fact that you have a plan is recorded. However, the plan stays with you and is not a public record.

Frequently asked questions

What is the Habitat Conservation Ordinance?

The Habitat Conservation Ordinance was developed as a way to balance the needs of property owners and the needs of wildlife habitat. Although fish and wildlife habitat has been one of the county's distinguishing features, the areas where animals live has come under increasing pressure. The Habitat Conservation Ordinance is an effort to deal with this issue. The ordinance can be viewed at www.codepublishing.com/WA/ClarkCounty/clarkco40/clarkco40440/clarkco40440.html#40.440.

Why is it important to protect habitat areas?

Salmon and steelhead that rely on our rivers and streams are declining. Some are nearing extinction. By changing our agricultural activities along rivers and streams, habitat areas can continue to provide what fish and other creatures need to survive.

How do I know if my land is in a habitat area covered by the ordinance?

The most common lands covered by the ordinance are near streams, creeks and lakes. If you are conducting agricultural activities on land next to water, there is a good chance that the ordinance applies to you. County staff can help you determine if you are in a designated habitat area.

How can I protect habitat areas on my land?

The ordinance offers two options to protect habitat areas. The Default Protection option is simple. If you select this option you must avoid doing agricultural activities in designated habitat areas.

The other option is to develop a Habitat Protection Plan. This option is more flexible and allows you to continue with your operations as long as they do not substantially degrade the habitat. You are asked to rate your site conditions, develop a certified plan and implement best management practices that will prevent negative impacts to the wildlife habitat.

Trained Agricultural Technicians can work with you to find creative approaches to protecting your habitat areas. A contact list of certified Ag-techs is included in the kit

Who developed the Habitat Protection Plan guidelines?

The county worked with a committee of rural residents, farmers, and environmentalists to develop the Habitat Protection Plan guidelines. Representing a wide range of interests and concerns, the committee members worked cooperatively to create guidelines that would be effective and fair to all concerned.

Who do I call if I have questions about my plan?

Trained ag-habitat technicians can help you develop your plan. You can also contact any of the resource agencies below.

Where can I get more information about the ordinance?

Clark County ESA Program

Clark County Public Service Center
1300 Franklin St.
Vancouver, WA
(360) 397-2022

Clark County Community Development

Clark County Public Service Center
1300 Franklin St.
Vancouver, WA
(360) 397-2375 ext. 4598 or ext. 5602

Clark County Weed Management

11104 NE 149th St, Bldg C, Suite 200
Brush Prairie, WA
(360) 397-6140

Where can I get information about habitat conservation?

Clark Conservation District

11104 NE 149th St, Bldg C, Suite 400
Brush Prairie, WA
(360) 883-1987

Natural Resources Conservation Services

11104 NE 149th St, Bldg C, Suite 400
Brush Prairie, WA
(360) 883-1987 ext. 3

WSU Extension

11104 NE 149th St, Bldg C, Suite 100
Brush Prairie, WA
(360) 397-6060



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Clark County ADA Compliance Office.
Phone: (360)397-2025
TTY: (360) 397-2445
E-mail: ADA@clark.wa.gov



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